



## Illinois Department of **Natural Resources**

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Illinois Conservation Police remind boaters to wear life jackets, stay sober and stay safe on the water this summer**

SPRINGFIELD, IL – Safety on Illinois lakes, rivers and other waterways starts with wearing a life jacket and staying sober as the busy spring and summer boating season begins.

Illinois Department of Natural Resource (IDNR) Conservation Police – as part of the observance of National Safe Boating Week on May 21-27 – are reminding boat operators and passengers to “Wear It!” – the theme of the national safe boating campaign encouraging the use of life jackets.

“We want everyone to enjoy their time on the water in Illinois – and among the best ways to stay safe are wearing a life jacket and stay sobering while on the water,” said IDNR Director Marc Miller.

Statistics compiled by the IDNR Office of Law Enforcement show that there were 102 reportable boating accidents on Illinois waters in 2010 resulting in 73 injuries and 16 fatalities. Those totals compare with 102 reportable boating accidents on Illinois waters in 2009 resulting in 71 injuries and 25 fatalities.

“Our Illinois Conservation Police make boat safety a point of emphasis on every patrol shift and in every safety inspection in which they participate because they know the importance of making sure watercraft operators and passengers have life jackets and other safety gear aboard,” said IDNR Law Enforcement Chief Rafael Gutierrez. “Year after year, we help rescue boaters involved in accidents who survive because they’re wearing a personal floatation device.”

Illinois law requires that personal floatation devices (PFDs) – life jackets or life vests – be available for each person aboard a boat or other watercraft. State law also requires that anyone under the age of 13 must wear a life jacket while aboard any watercraft under 26 feet in length at all times the boat is underway, unless they are below deck in an

enclosed cabin or operating on private property. Illinois law also requires persons of any age to wear a PFD while operating a personal watercraft or jet ski.

As part of the Illinois Conservation Police boating safety enforcement effort, officers also strictly enforce laws regarding operating under the influence (OUI) for boat operators.

“Just as impaired driving puts you and others on the road at risk, boaters operating watercraft under the influence are also a danger to themselves, their passengers, and other boaters,” Gutierrez said. “Our CPOs make dozens of arrests for OUI each boating season. Stay sober and make sure you’re not one of them.”

Among the primary causes of boating accidents are operator inattention, alcohol use, careless/reckless operation, and operator inexperience. The IDNR offers **free boating safety courses** providing a review of boating laws and regulations and instruction on safe and attentive operation of watercraft. State law requires boating safety education for persons ages 12 to 17 and encourages boaters of all ages to take a safety course. Safety courses, which are taught by volunteer instructors, are available throughout Illinois and schedules are available by calling 1-800/832-2599 or by checking the links on the IDNR website’s boating information page at [www.dnr.illinois.gov/boating](http://www.dnr.illinois.gov/boating).

National Safe Boating Week is observed each year during the week leading up to the Memorial Day holiday. This year’s National Safe Boating Week observance is May 21-27 with the theme “Wear It!” to remind boaters of the importance of wearing life jackets. For more information on the national safe boating campaign, go to the website at [www.safeboatingcouncil.org](http://www.safeboatingcouncil.org).

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